

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF ENGLISH WORD-STOCK ETYMOLOGICAL LAYERS OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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Abstract: The problems associated with the definition of the word have always been most complex and remain disputable. Determining the word involves considerable difficulties for the criteria employed in establishing it are of different character and each language presents a separate system with its own patterns of vocabulary items, its specific types of structural units and its own ways of distinguishing them. The matter is that the simplest word has many different aspects. It has a sound form because it is a certain arrangement of phonemes. It has its morphological structure, being a certain arrangement of morphemes.

Key words: word-stock, vocabulary, etymology, internal, external, borrowed words, native word, Anglo-Norman.

Being the central element of any language system, the word is a sort of focus for the problems of phonology, lexicology, syntax, morphology and also some other sciences that have to deal with language and speech, such as philosophy, psychology and probably quite a few other branches of knowledge. All attempts to characterize the word are necessarily specific for each domain of science and are considered one-sided by the representatives of all the other domains and criticised for incompleteness. [35; 131]

The definition of the word from the point of view of philosophy:

Words are not mere sounds but names of matter (T. Hobbes).

The definition of the word from the point of view of physiology:

A word is a universal signal that can substitute any other signal from the environment in evoking a response in a human organism (I. Pavlov).

The definition of the word from the point of view of Machine Mathematical Linguistics:

A word is a sequence of graphemes between two blanks.

The definition of the word from the point of view of syntax:

A word is a minimum sentence (H. Sweet).

A word is a minimum free form (L. Bloomfield).

The definition of the word from the point of view of semantics:

Words are meaningful units (S. Ullmann).

Many scholars have attempted to define the word as a linguistic phenomenon. Yet none of the definitions can be considered totally satisfactory in all aspects. The definition which is a bit extended but takes into account different aspects and hence can be considered optimal is the definition of the word given by I. Arnold:

The word is a speech unit used for the purposes of human communication, materially representing a group of sounds, possessing a meaning, susceptible to grammatical employment and characterised by formal and semantic unity. [1 ; 121]

Etymological survey of the old English vocabulary

Examination of the origin of words is of great interest in establishing the interrelations between language and linguistic groups. Word etymology throws light on the history of the speaking community and its contacts with other people.

The OE vocabulary was almost purely Germanic, except for a small number of borrowings, it consisted of native words inherited from PG or formed from native root and affixes.[3 ; 20]

Etymologically the vocabulary of the English language is far from being homogeneous. It consists of two layers — the native stock of words and the borrowed stock of words.

A native word is a word, which belongs to the original English stock, as known from the earliest available manuscripts of the Old English period. A loan word, borrowed word or borrowing is a word taken over from another language and modified in phonemic shape, spelling, paradigm or meaning according to the standards of the English language. The native words are further subdivided by diachronic linguistics into those of the Indo-European stock and those of Common Germanic origin i.e. of words having parallels in German, Norwegian, Dutch, Icelandic, etc., but none in Russian, Ukrainian or French. The words having the cognates (words of the same etymological root, of common origin) in

the vocabularies of different Indo-European languages form the oldest layer which readily falls into definite semantic groups:

1. Family relations: father, mother, brother, son, daughter (cf. Ukr. мати, брат, син.).
2. Parts of the human body: foot (cf. Rus. пядь), nose (cf. Ukr. ніс), lip, heart.
3. Animals: cow, swine, goose.
4. Plants: tree, birch (cf. Rus. береза), corn (cf. Rus. зерно).
5. Time of day: day, night.
6. Heavenly bodies: sun, moon, star.
7. Numerous adjectives: red (cf. Ukr. рудий, Rus. рыжий), new, glad (cf. Rus. гладкий), sad (cf. Rus. сыт).
8. The numerals from one to a hundred.
9. Pronouns: personal (except they which is a Scandinavian borrowing); demonstrative.
10. Numerous verbs: be (cf. Rus. быть), stand (cf. Rus. стоять), sit (cf. Rus. сидеть), eat (cf. Rus. есть), know (cf. Rus. знать, знаю).[5;17]

Some of the most frequent verbs are also of Indo-European common stock: bear, come, sit, stand and others. The adjectives of this group denote concrete physical properties: hard, quick, slow, red, white. Most numerals also belong here.

The Germanic element represents words of roots common to all or most Germanic languages. Some of the main groups of Germanic words are the same as in the Indo-European element.

1. Parts of the human body: head, hand, arm, finger, bone.
2. Animals: bear, fox, calf.
3. Plants: oak, fir, grass.
4. Natural phenomena: rain, frost.
5. Seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer.

6. Landscape features: sea, land.
 7. Human dwellings and furniture: house, room, bench.
 8. Sea-going vessels: boat, ship.
 9. Adjectives: green, blue, grey, white, small, thick, high, old, good.
 10. Verbs: see, hear, speak, tell, say, answer, make, give, drink.
- Many adverbs and pronouns also belong to this layer.

It is probably of some interest to mention that at various times purists have tried to purge the English language of foreign words, replacing them with Anglo-Saxon ones. One slogan created by these linguistic nationalists was: "Avoid Latin derivatives; use brief, terse Anglo-Saxon monosyllables". The irony is that the only Anglo-Saxon word in the entire slogan is "Anglo-Saxon".[1; 130]

In its fifteen century long history recorded in written manuscripts the English language happened to come in long and close contact with several other languages, mainly Latin, French, Old Norse. The great influx of borrowings from these sources can be accounted for by a number of historical causes. Due to the great influence of the Roman civilisation Latin was for a long time used in England as the language of learning and religion. Old Norse was the language of the conquerors who brought with them a lot of new notions of a higher social system – developed feudalism – it was the language of upper classes, of official documents from the middle of the 11th century to the end of the 14th century.[5;18]

In the study of the borrowed element in English the main emphasis is as a rule placed on the Middle English period. Borrowings of the later periods became the object of investigation only in recent years. These investigations show that the flow of borrowings has been steady and uninterrupted. The greatest number of them has come from French. A large portion of them is scientific and technical terms. The number and character of borrowings do not only depend on the historical conditions, on the nature and length of contacts but also on the degree of the genetic and structural proximity of the languages concerned.. Thus

under the influence of the Scandinavian languages, which were closely related to Old English, some classes of words were borrowed that could not have been adopted from non-related or distantly related languages. Borrowings enter the language in two ways: through oral and written speech. Oral borrowing took place chiefly in the early periods of history, whereas in recent times written borrowing gained importance. Words borrowed orally are usually short and they undergo more changes in the act of adoption. Written borrowings preserve their spelling.

In some cases the pronunciation of the word, its spelling and the correlation between sounds and letters are an indication of the foreign origin of the word: waltz (German), psychology (Greek). The initial position of the sounds [v], [dz], [z] or of the letters x, j, z is a sure sign that the word has been borrowed: vase (French), jungle (Hindi), gesture (Latin).[]

The whole of the word-stock of the English language can be divided into three main layers: the literary layer, the neutral layer and the colloquial layer. The literary and colloquial layers contain a number of subgroups each of which has a property it shares with all the subgroups within the layer. Prof. I. Galperin calls this common property the aspect. The aspect of the literary layer is its markedly bookish character. It makes the layer more or less stable. The aspect of the colloquial layer is its lively spoken character which makes the layer unstable. The aspect of the neutral layer is its universal character. That means it is unrestricted in its use. It can be used in all styles of the language. It is this feature that makes the layer the most stable of all.

The subgroups of the special literary vocabulary are the following: terms, poetical words, foreignisms and barbarisms, archaic words, nonce-words.

The subgroups of the special colloquial layer are such: dialectical words, vulgarisms, slang, jargon, professionalisms, nonce-words.

The common literary, neutral and common colloquial words are grouped under the term Standard English vocabulary. Other groups in the literary layer are

regarded as special literary vocabulary and those in the colloquial layer are regarded as special colloquial vocabulary.

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